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Transportation Topics

FOR CONSUMERS

from the Office of Consumer Affairs

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REVITALIZING THE NATION'S RAILROADS

Goods on the Way to the Consumer by Rail

Some of the Problems Now Headed for Solution

By Joann Sloane

Somewhere in the United States this morning a man woke to the ringing of his alarm clock.

He stumbled in the darkness until he switched on the electric lights.

Perhaps he was cold and turned up the heat. Perhaps he was warm and turned up the air conditioning.

He showered, dressed, then sat down to a breakfast of ham and eggs. He read his morning newspaper while he ate.

Then he got into his car and drove to work.

Chances are he never thought about the railroads during all this time—not even once.

He didn't need to. There was no reason.

But if his lights hadn't gone on . . . or if the heat hadn't worked . . . or if he had had no ham and eggs to eat . . . or if his paper hadn't been at the front door . . . or if he had had no car. . . .

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"NO-FAULT" AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

by Richard F. Walsh

Over the past few years, a number of States have changed their automobile accident reparations laws by adopting what is popularly known as "no-fault" insurance. Most other States are considering making similar changes, and the time may not be far distant when the vast bulk of the nation's drivers will be covered by some type of a "no-fault" system.

The term "no-fault" is used to distinguish this form of insurance from the "fault" or liability insurance which our states' financial responsibility laws have, by and large, required most motor vehicle owners to carry. Under "no-fault," accident victims receive compensation for their economic losses directly from their own insurance company or from the insurer of the vehicle in which they were riding, regardless of who might have been "at fault" in the accident and without having to sue or negotiate in

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TRANSPORTATION NOISE

By William H. Close

Traditionally, people have chosen to live close to transportation facilities for the obvious conveniences. However, because of transportation-related noise many people now choose to live some distance from major facilities.

Transportation noise can be a problem near highways, airports, and other modes of transportation. Noise generated by transportation may be annoying, may interfere with conversation and can also interfere with sleep. Transportation noise, however, is not known to be enough or heard long enough to cause hearing loss for non-occupational exposures.

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Citizens' Advisory Committee members: Vincent Scoper, Jr. of Laurel, Mlssissippi; Holm Bursum III, Socorro, New Mexico; Dorothea Brennan, Fairfield, Connecticut; and Henry Acchione, Philadelphia, Pa. study the adequacy and quality of public transportation in the U.S. Mr. Bursum and Ms. Brennan are new members.

At a meeting of the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transportation Quality, held in Washington, D.C., April 1-2, the delivery of transit service information to consumers was one of the topics considered. Listening to the discussion are (L to R): Ruth Ellis, Atlanta, Ga.; Ann Uccello, Office of Consumer Affairs, DOT; Frank Piasecki, Philadelphia, Pa.; Claud McCamment, Topeka, Kansas; William Boardman, Ketchikan, Alaska; Harvey McIntyre, Missoula, Montana. Ms. Ellis and Mr. Piasecki are new members.

NEW MEMBERS APPOINTED

Ki Shu Park of Los Angeles, California, Chairman of the Citizen's Advisory Committee on Transportation Quality concluded that there are serious deficiencies in the delivery of transit service information to consumers.

Secretary of Transportation Claude S. Brinegar has appointed seven new members to the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transportation Quality.

The 21-member citizen committee evaluates departmental programs, recommends transportation initiatives and acts as a citizens' sounding board. Its members serve a maximum term of three years. Chairman of the committee is Ki Suh Park of Los Angeles, California. New members are:

Dorothea Brennan, Fairfield, Connecticut
Holm Bursum, III, Socorro, New Mexico
Ruth J. Ellis, Atlanta, Georgia
John W. Ormond, New Orleans, Louisiana
Lillie Ann Owens, Kansas City, Kansas
Frank N. Piasecki, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Elizabeth A. Straus, New York City, New York

The full committee which met April 1-2 in Washington, D.C., is studying the adequacy and quality of public transportation in the United States. One conclusion made at the April meeting was that there are serious deficiencies in the delivery of transit service information to consumers (schedules, routes, fares, and transfer information) and recommended that the Department of Transportation, in cooperation with Federal, state and local agencies, take the necessary legislative and procedural steps to improve the delivery of transportation service information to consumers.

JOURNEY TO WORK DIFFICULT FOR TRANSIT DEPENDENT

Black poverty area residents in the lowest paying occupations are the most dependent on public transportation. Their journey-to-work treks usually take longer and cost more than those of white poverty area urban residents according to a recent study conducted by the Research Department of the National Urban League (NUL) for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The study entitled "Journey to Work Patterns of Transportation Consumers Among the Urban Disadvantaged," was conducted during calendar year 1973. Twelve cities were selected for study. They were: Atlanta, Georgia; Dayton, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; Houston, Texas; Buffalo, New York; Louisville, Kentucky; Miami, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; Washington, D.C.; and Wichita, Kansas. In addition, data from the following sources was examined: the Census Employment Survey data for 1970-71; 1970 Census Population and Housing Characteristics data; Non-residential building permit data for 1968-71 and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data for 1971.

The NUL recommends that further research be conducted in this and related areas. They also recommend that access to housing near job centers outside the city limits should be made available to minority workers and that guidelines in granting government contracts should incorporate as a criterion the accessibility of the plant to minority workers.

The research project was conducted by Wilhelmina Leigh and Esther S. Piovia under the direction of Dr. Robert B. Hill, Director of the NUL Research Department. The final report is available from the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, Virginia 22151 at a cost of $5.50—order number, PB-230-704. A brief Executive Summary sells for $3.00—order number, PB-230-703.

Federal Highway Workshops Promote Interagency Environmental Coordination

Federal, state and local speakers and panel members with various viewpoints and levels of involvement in highway environmental concerns participated in regional workshops sponsored by the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration from September 1973 to May 1974.

Six workshops, each involving approximately 40 agencies, examined and discussed a broad range of environmental considerations in the highway planning process. Engineers, environmentalists, design consultants, historic preservationists, wildlife, fishing and forest specialists, archeologists, and community participation leaders presented viewpoints and applications of their specialties toward achieving practical and environmentally sound highway planning. The workshops were held in Baltimore, Maryland; Carson City, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; Fort Worth, Texas; Springfield, Illinois; and Portland, Oregon.

Management of the workshops was conducted by FHWA Regional Administrators. There are ten regions nationwide with four to eight states in each. Invitations to attend the workshops went to all Federal and state highway departments or state departments of transportation engineering personnel in the region. In addition, environmental specialists from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of the Interior, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), Department of Agriculture, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) were asked to participate in the symposium. The Historic Preservation Officer from each state also joined the workshop as did members of the Sierra Club and League of Women Voters.

Program discussions were developed and led by the EPA and FHWA in the areas of air quality and noise abatement requirements. New environmental guidelines and future considerations were discussed by the CEQ and they joined with other Federal and state agencies in symposiums on the National Environmental Protection Act of 1966.

A special section of the three-day workshop was devoted to protection and enhancement of the historic and cultural environment. Members of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Department of the Interior, and the designee to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation for the Secretary of Transportation chaired discussions on Executive Order 11593 and Section 106 Procedures of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA). The Executive Order mandates policy and action for Federal agencies in inventorying and nominating Federal property for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The 106 Procedures of NHPA govern the review and comment process of National Register properties affected by Federal, state and local undertakings.

The informal workshop format centered on the review and coordination procedures of the CEQ guidelines, NEPA, the proposed new DOT Order 5610.1B and FHWA Policy and Procedure Memorandum 90-1. These documents govern the procedures and actions taken to assure environmental considerations in the highway planning process and evolvement of the actual construction. The November 1973 issue of "Transportation Topics" gives a more detailed description of the procedures that have been developed to protect the environment in an article on historic preservation. The Portland, Oregon, Workshop format was enlarged to include emphasis on land use planning, water resources, wetlands, coastal zone management, citizen involvement, and transportation land use.

During the discussions, highway engineers had the opportunity to explain their special problems and to listen to recommendations from other participants interested in various aspects of highway environmental concerns.

Mr. John D. Kramer, prominent environmentalist and Director of the Office of Planning, Programming and Environmental Science, Illinois Department of Transportation, responding to comments from the floor after a luncheon address on the third day of a workshop held in Springfield, Illinois. This was one of six workshops held since September 1973 in efforts to achieve practical and environmentally sound highway planning.

A single bill of lading is often used when goods are packed in large bulk containers that can be easily transferred from trains to trucks to airplanes, barges or ships.

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Revitalizing the Nation's Railroads

He might have thought of the railroads then—because the absence of these everyday, taken-for-granted things could very well have meant the railroads weren't on the job.

But America's railroads are on the job, just as they have been for nearly 150 years.

The story of the railroads is, after all, the story of America: always exciting, often footnoted with danger, highlighting man's courage and ingenuity, and brimming with the brash confidence that he has the ability to tame a continent and mold it to his liking in spite of the odds.

The railroads opened the West, tied the country together with a web of rails that crisscrossed the land, and literally hauled the United States into the twentieth century.

Wherever rails were laid, new towns sprang up. Industry and commerce developed. Agricultural production increased. And land values multiplied. For three generations the railroad was to be the essential tangible fact of American life. There were to be other engines of change in the winning of the West and the welding of a nation, but the dominant beast of burden in the building of the American empire was surely and majestically the Iron Horse.

Today the railroads are no longer the preeminent mode of transportation—the only way to go. Subsidized highway and airway systems coupled with antiquated government regulations have taken their toll, although railroads still carry some 39 percent of the nation's freight.

American railroads in 1973 enjoyed their biggest year in history, handling 846.8 ton-miles of freight. So far in 1974, the freight business has been even better: up three percent over the same period last year. According to all the theories of railroad operation, railroads ought to be enjoying their biggest profits in history.

They are not. American railroads are in bad shape despite these dream levels of business. Seven major railroads in the Northeast are in bankruptcy. And the rate of return on investment for all railroads is a lowly three percent.

This inability to earn money in the industry's finest year is more than a knockdown of traditional wisdom. It raises a serious question about the future viability of the entire railroad industry. Instead of enjoying the most profitable year in history, many railroads are worn out and exhausted. This failure is rooted in problems that have been building up for years.

The stakes in preserving and rehabilitating the nation's railroads go far beyond the near term. Longer-range, railroads provide the best foreseeable way to keep the economy moving without consuming too much scarce energy or unduly upsetting a fragile environment. In the meantime, more of them are on the verge of collapse.

Through the efforts of the Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration, some of the problems are headed toward solution. In 1970, legislation was passed which set up a semi-public corporation—the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak)—to run the country's intercity passenger trains. Amtrak is now established as part of the railroad scene and ridership has reached all-time highs.

Also enacted in 1970 was a bill giving the FRA responsibility for all areas of railroad safety. The Federal Railroad Safety Act called for the establishment of standards to ensure that people and goods move under the safest possible conditions.

In late 1973 came passage of the Regional Rail Reorganization Act which created the machinery for the reorganization and restructuring of the bankrupt railroads in the Northeast region of the country.

The legislation sets up two organizations: the United States Railway Association, an independent government agency that is charged with planning and financing the new streamlined rail system; and the Consolidated Railroad Corporation (CRC), which will operate the redesigned system on a private, for-profit basis.

The final system plan will identify which properties of railroads in reorganization will be offered for sale to a profitable railroad, which will go to CRC, which might be acquired by Amtrak, and which might be acquired by state or local authorities. In dollar terms, the new law can provide up to $1.5 billion in guaranteed loans and more than 500 million in grants to pay salaries of workers who lose their jobs, subsidies for continuation of service on unprofitable branch lines, interim operating funds for the bankrupt lines, and administrative expenses.

These solutions to problems are only piecemeal, however. They will bandage the cuts but not heal the wound. They are only stepping stones to a larger and more important step that needs to be taken to improve the economic climate for the railroads.

The Department has proposed a new piece of legislation—the Transportation Improvement Act—as the vehicle for improving both the regulatory climate and the financial health of the entire rail freight system. The key objective of the proposal is to take preventive action now so as to avoid any more bankruptcies.

The bill would authorize up to $2 billion in Federal loan guarantees to assist railroads in making investments in track, terminals and rolling stock. The loans would have to contribute to the establishment of a rational, efficient national railroad transportation system, and the borrowing railroad must have the ability to repay it. The particular project being financed would also have to be a good investment in terms of projected return and improved efficiency.

The legislation, in addition, calls for an updating of the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, removing those outdated regulatory constraints that unnecessarily restrain competition and adversely affect the rail industry's economic performance. The original intent back in the days of the robber barons was commendable. In those days, the railroads were virtual monopolies. The proposed amendments would be directed toward giving rail managements the needed authority to manage, to be able to innovate with new freight rates and services, and to more quickly adjust their operations to changing economic conditions.

Finally, the bill would provide $35 million to design and implement a national program for the efficient scheduling and control of freight cars. There are some 1.7 million freight cars in the country and they aren't being used nearly well enough. For example, a mere 10 percent increase in utilization would have the same effect as putting 170,000 new boxcars into the system.

A thriving rail system is important for the entire economy. The prices of retail items, for instance—whether food or manufactured products—are based on a number of factors. One of the most important is the cost of transportation. For large numbers of commodities needing to be hauled over long distances, rail transportation is by far the most economical way to go. The more volume carried—that is, the more tons per freight mile, the more cars per train, the more trains per day—the lower the cost of hauling each shipment.

The FRA's mission is to foster the health and well-being of this vital link in our transportation system. The legislative tools are being forged, safety is being enhanced, and important research is being conducted to further these aims. One day in the near future, the railroads will again be respected for what they are and valued at what they are really worth.

(Joann Sloane is on the Public Affairs staff of the Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration.)

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"No-Fault" Automobile Insurance

order to recover one's losses. Under the existing "fault" or liability system, only a victim who can prove that he was innocent of any wrongdoing and that someone else was negligent can recover his losses, and even then he may have to engage in lengthy negotiation and litigation. Moreover, he must deal not with an insurer of his own choice and with whom he has an enforceable contractual relationship but rather with the faulty driver's insurer under conditions that place him at a bargaining disadvantage.

"No-fault" auto insurance is, thus, like most other types of insurance that the average consumer is used to. As in the case of home owner's insurance, medical and hospital insurance and income disability insurance, the insured chooses his own insurance company, is paid promptly upon proof of loss, and only rarely has to obtain legal counsel or resort to the courts in order to obtain satisfaction of his claim.

"No-fault" automobile insurance is actually a very old idea, having been suggested by a Cleveland, Ohio judge, Robert Marx, back in 1927. As automobile usage grew and accidents and accident losses grew in volume, proponents of a simple, more economical, and more straightforward way of compensating accident victims multiplied. By the mid-1960's, the symptoms of malfunction in the traditional reparations system—high premiums, long delays in payment, court congestion, uncompensated losses (especially for the very seriously injured), etc.—had become a national concern. But even while the Congress was turning its attention to the problem, two Harvard Law School professors, Robert Keeton and Jeffrey O'Connell, were perfecting the first fully developed "no-fault" plan. A variant of that plan was enacted into law by Massachusetts in 1970.

About the same time, the Federal Department of Transportation completed a Congressionally mandated two-year, $2 million study of the nation's auto accident compensation problem. That study found that ". . . The

existing [insured tort liability] system ill serves the accident victim, the insuring public and society. It is inefficient, over costly, incomplete and slow. It allocates benefits poorly, discourages rehabilitation and overburdens the courts and the legal system. . . . It does little if anything to minimize crash losses." In its place, the Administration urged that ". . . the States should begin promptly to shift to a first party, no-fault compensation system for automobile accident victims."

One common misconception about no-fault insurance is that it removes or dilutes the motorist's obligation to drive in a careful and prudent fashion because he will no longer be held personally responsible for the damage or injury he causes. But this, of course, is exactly what our present liability insurance system does. It, too, shifts the obligation to pay from the guilty driver to the insurance company. The difference is that no-fault insurance promises to deliver benefits to all victims faster, cheaper and with greater certainty than the present system.

The motorist's moral obligation to respect the lives and property of others in his driving behavior is in no way reduced by no-fault insurance. Nor does it diminish his obligation to obey the traffic laws. No-fault does not mean that the matter of "fault" is no longer important; it simply means that the compensation of accident losses will no longer have to wait or rest upon a determination of fault.

A serious deficiency of the present system of auto liability insurance is that it tends to grossly over-compensate victims with minor injuries while grossly under-compensating those with very serious injuries. For example, when his loss is less than $500, the typical victim paid by liability insurance receives four-and-one-half times his actual economic loss. However, if his loss is over $25,000, he typically recovers only one-third of his losses.

No-fault insurance attempts to help redress this imbalance by curbing the amount of over-payment for the so-called "pain and suffering" in the smaller cases and using the savings to reimburse seriously injured victims or to cut insurance premium. No-fault thus supports two important goals—a fairer allocation of insurance benefits among different classes of victims and a more efficient use of the motorists' insurance dollar.

(Mr. Walsh is Acting Director, Office of Policy Development in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Plans and International Affairs, U.S. Department of Transportation.)

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Transportation Noise

Transportation noise is a highly localized occurrence. In most cases, the areas affected are limited in scope and are close to the transportation facilities (highways, airports, rail yards, etc.).

The Federal Government has been funding transportation noise research, demonstration and abatement programs costing as much as 60 million dollars a year. Substantial legislation has evolved providing the basis for Federal regulation of noise at work locations and in the general environment. The regulations have begun to affect a number of areas and predictions of the future indicate more significant impacts to come. The Occupational Safety and Health Act establishes a framework for regulation of workplace hazards by the Department of Labor including excessive noise exposure that would be detrimental to the hearing of workers. Regulations have also been established by the Department of Transportation's Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety for drivers of commercial vehicles that will limit permanent hearing damage over a working career to a very small probability. These protective regulations were developed by extensive research on vehicle noise and studies of hearing loss caused by noise exposure in factories. Similar occupational exposure standards pertain to the use of hearing protection devices for ground crews around military and commercial aircraft.

Public Law 90–411 provides the Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration with authority to establish noise standards for aircraft. Such standards have been issued for a variety of new aircraft and in-service aircraft resulting in the development of quieter wide body aircraft such as the 747, DC–10, and L–1011. Quieting kits for existing aircraft such as the 727, 737, DC–9, DC–8 and 707 are being developed and demonstrated within the FAA research program. Rulemaking is presently underway which, if brought to a successful conclusion, will require back fitting with quiet kits of all aircraft of this commercial type. This will significantly reduce the noise of these aircraft. Regulations are being established that pertain to other types of aircraft and to the ways in which all aircraft are to operate in the vicinity of airports with the sole purpose of reducing noise exposure to nearby communities.

The Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration has established noise standards for the design and citing of all new interstate highways and for the design and approval of projects to reduce noise from existing highways. Computer simulation programs and demonstrations of noise abatement techniques, such as building of roadside barriers, have been underway within the research program for a number of years. These efforts are providing the tools for highway designers and city planners to meet low noise standards.

The Department of Transportation is also directing research and development activities to demonstrate quiet trucks and quiet tires for all vehicles on the highways so that noise may be reduced at the source. The Environmental Protection Agency will be setting noise standards for new trucks and for interstate motor carriers in highway operation. The Department of Transportation is the enforcement agency for noise of interstate motor carriers.

The enforcement of any noise standard is a very critical item if there is to be a meaningful noise reduction for affected communities. In the case of motor vehicle noise, the quieter new trucks meeting Federal noise regu-

lations must be maintained by the owners to pass operational checks made by enforcement officials at inspection stations weigh stations and at special locations along the Nation's highways. Department of Transportation officials will be enforcing noise regulations in the highway area - however, state and local officials must also be actively involved in this endeavor and must make use of the training and equipment provided by the Department.

Future transportation systems and vehicles are also receiving attention by the Department of Transportation in developing activities for future buses, future high speed rapid transit systems and the more elaborate tracked air cushion vehicles or magnetically levitated vehicles. In these endeavors, the Department has stringent noise and other pollution requirements. Future transportation systems can and will be made quiet and environmentally acceptable.

(Mr. Close is Chief of Environmental Research in the Department of Transportation's Office of Noise Abatement.)

PUBLICATION ON NOISE AND ITS CONTROL

A well illustrated technical publication entitled "Transportation Noise and Its Control" (1972) may be ordered from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C. 20402. The order number is TD 1.2.:N69 and the cost is 70¢.

FOR STREAKING PROBLEMS

Ever been frustrated by a streaky windshield? Of course sometimes it's a smashed bug. Ugh!!! Any kind of streaking on windshields that reduces visibility can be dangerous. Recently the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued a driver "alert" warning motorists of the need to keep auto windshields free of the liquid waxes used in many automatic car-wash establishments. There can be dangerous loss of visibility in a sudden rain storm due to the film created by the wax.

If car-wash attendants do not clean wax applications from window surfaces and wipers, motorists are advised that the job can be effectively done with most household window-cleaning products, or with common household detergents to which a small amount of alcohol may be added as a wax solvent. Vigorous rubbing may be necessary and don't forget the blade of the windshield wiper. Rinse away the cleaning solution.

MOTORCYCLISTS TAKE NOTE

Motorcyclists who do not wear safety helmets are nearly three times as likely to suffer serious or fatal head injuries in a crash as are those who wear the protective headgear according to a study conducted in two states by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Safety helmets provide this protection rate almost independent of the speed at which the accident occurs according to a detailed analysis of accidents in Michigan and Illinois. Michigan has a mandatory helmet law; Illinois does not.

Comparative case studies of more than 4,700 motorcycle accidents in the two states show that compulsory usage in Michigan reduced fatal or serious head injuries by 63 per cent. In contrast, Illinois motorcycle accidents produced nearly three times more fatal or serious head injuries, and twice the total head injuries.

Speed of impact alone did not appear to be an important factor in the study results which analyzed accidents occurring in various speed ranges. Helmets proved equally advantageous in all of the ranges with head injury reductions recorded at 60 per cent at speeds under 30 mph, 52 per cent at speeds from 30 to 50 mph, and 51 per cent at speeds over 50 mph.

However, the quality, condition, and design of the helmets were important. Analysis showed that helmets dislodged or broken during impact were only 20 per cent more effective than not wearing any type of helmet. Statistics from Illinois showed that 12 per cent of the helmets in rural accident were dislodged, probably because the wearer either did not fasten the strap or fastened it too loosely, or because there was a failure of the strap system under impact.

Young riders between the ages of 15 and 24 benefitted the most from Michigan's helmet law, accounting for 69 per cent of all riders involved in motorcycle accidents. Better than 90 per cent of Michigan's youthful riders wore helmets, compared with 30 per cent of young voluntary wearers in Illinois.

Copies of the report, entitled "A Motorcycle Safety Helmet Study," compiled by NHTSA's Research Institute, Office of Accident Investigation and Data Aanalysis, may be obtained by contacting the General Services Division of NHTSA.

LIFE JACKETS IN PLACE!

Boating is fun but take precautions. It's no fun to wind up a statistic in the U.S. Coast Guard's annual "Boating Statistics" report.

During 1973, 1,754 persons lost their lives in boating accidents, according to the USCG report issued in May. There were 5,322 boating accidents involving 6,738 vessels. Resulting from these accidents were injuries to 1,599 persons and $11,376,600 in property damage.

The publication "(Almost) Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Boating—But Were Ashamed to Ask" might prevent you from becoming a statistic. Write for a single free copy to:

Commandant—GBBE-1
U.S. Coast Guard
U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

TIRE GRADING REGULATION REVOKED

New Proposal Issued

The March 1974 issue of "Transportation Topics" contained an article describing a new tire grading regulation that was scheduled to become effective in September 1974. However the regulation, as described, has been revoked because of the Government's inability to obtain from the tire industry "control tires" which were to have been used as the basis for determining comparative performance grades for treadwear and traction.

The newly proposed regulation, issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), would require grading of passenger car tires for treadwear, traction and high speed performance effective May 1, 1975.

Under the new proposal, treadwear grades would be in the form of numbers and would represent a tire's projected mileage (the distance traveled before the tire is worn down to its treadwear indicators) as tested on a single predetermined test course.

The safety agency plans to locate the 400-mile-long test course in the vicinity of San Angelo, Texas. Each treadwear test would require 16 circuits of the course. Both the tire industry, at the option of the individual manufacturer, and the safety agency would perform treadwear tests on the course; the industry for establishing grades, and the government for testing the validity of grades assigned.

Tests would be designed to differentiate treadwear performance of bias, bias-belted, and radial tires. Performance of manufacturers' tires would be measured against that of a tire of the same general construction type, which would be supplied by the NHTSA. Grade categories would represent a minimum performance figure to which every tire would be expected to perform if tested by the government on the government course.

Under the proposal, traction grades would be in the form of asterisks or five-pointed stars and would be based on the tire's stopping ability when tested on two wet surfaces, one of concrete and the other of asphalt.

The traction test is similar to that required in the previous regulation. The NHTSA proposes to provide test facilities for use by manufacturers and by the safety agency. The surfaces, representing typical highway conditions, would also be constructed near San Angelo, Texas, thus giving industry the opportunity to test for treadwear and traction in the same geographical area.

The proposed high speed performance test is essentially the same as that contained in the previous regulation. High speed grades would be in the form of letters ("A," "B," or "C") representing the tire's resistance to heat and its ability to dissipate heat. The revised proposal also retains the plan for providing grading information to purchasers through the molding of quality grades into the tire sidewall, and through the use of tread labels containing the quality grades for each tire.

Interested parties are invited to submit comments on the proposal by writing to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. The comment period closes on September 12, 1974.

The Secretary of Transportation has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through August 30, 1975.

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